

**Official Statement of the United States Delegation
to the International Cooperation and Coordination Meeting for Colombia
USAID Administrador, Andrew Natsios
Cartagena de Indias, Colombia
February 3-4, 2005**

As Head of the United States delegation, first and foremost I would like to express my Government's gratitude to the Colombian Government for hosting this historic conference. Along with other members of the international community, the United States remains resolute in its support for Colombia's ongoing peace process and concerted efforts to achieve sustainable economic growth and a strengthened democracy. By working together and building a shared vision, we can assist Colombia to end the scourge of the illicit drug trade and strengthen legitimate state institutions in a manner that protects the rights and freedoms of its citizens-the very freedoms and rights that we often take for granted.

We are moving beyond the London Declaration, signed in July 2003, which provided the foundation for our collective commitment to Colombia and cemented our support to Colombia's effort to tackle the interconnected and destabilizing effects of terrorism and illegal drugs. We all embraced and pledged our support to President Uribe's unwavering commitment to achieve a lasting solution to the violence waged by illegal, armed narco-terrorist groups. With members numbering 40,000 people in a country of over 40 million, these groups have brought death, destruction, and displacement to tens of thousands of hard-working citizens and their families who wish only to live in peace and to lead productive lives.

I applaud the impressive progress made by the Uribe Administration. Colombia's corruption index improved by 17% between 2000 and 2004. According to Transparency International, countries that pay attention to both the economy and good governance stand to gain the most. The successes of the Uribe administration clearly validate this widely accepted hypothesis: 3.7% economic growth in 2003; a steadily declining fiscal deficit; a nearly two-fold increase in foreign direct investment; and the creation of over 370,000 new jobs in the agriculture sector alone-reducing unemployment to its lowest rate in three years. The government of Colombia's dramatic fiscal adjustment effort is all the more impressive when taking into account the fact that security-related expenditures have risen dramatically during the same period.

President Uribe's fierce commitment to improving security has led to a marked improvement in the country's human rights record: over the past year the national homicide rate fell by 12% and kidnappings by 42%. The *Human Rights Observatory* reported an 80% reduction in the number of attacks on populations and a 41% decrease in the forced displacement of Colombian families. Moreover, the Colombian government's combined tactics of eradication, interdiction and alternative development slashed coca cultivation by 47% between 2000 and 2003,

according to United Nations data. Finally, the progress achieved in the demobilization of nearly 6,000 ex-combatants is tremendously encouraging. Our hope and expectation is that this will serve as an example for other illegal armed groups to come forward and begin a dialogue of peace and reconciliation.

Colombia, however, continues to face several challenges and there is still much to do. Cases of abuse and corruption go unresolved. Terrorist organizations, sometimes using foreign territory as a platform for their activities continue to threaten peace. In this regard, we offer our most sincere sympathy--for the lives of soldiers and marines in recent brutal FARC attacks--to Colombians and the families of the victims. Numerous rural municipalities remain isolated by poor infrastructure and fragile institutions, and prone to illicit crop cultivation, forced displacement, violence and human rights abuses.

An estimated two thirds of the Colombian population still lives below the poverty line and these conditions are exacerbated in rural areas by a 15% illiteracy rate. While Colombia's illegal armed groups have been weakened, their presence and ability to exert violence against the state and civilians continues. While the human rights situation has improved, much remains to be done, both bringing to justice those responsible for past abuses, as well as preventing such abuses in the future. We applaud the government's efforts to demobilize paramilitary combatants and look forward to the Colombian congress passing an effective legal framework that furthers the principles of truth, justice and reparations. Despite various tax and other revenue-enhancing schemes, fiscal constraints prevent the government from doing more.

Illegal drugs from Colombia, especially cocaine, are now flooding communities of all sizes both here and in Europe. Millions of children, young adults, and their families are being destroyed, along with the futures of our nations. But, as in the fight against terrorism, no government can fight drugs alone. Stopping the flow of drugs from Colombia to the United States and Europe will take a concerted effort. The scourge of illegal drugs is a global problem that demands a global response suited to this common challenge. This conference offers the international donor community a prime opportunity to commit a level of resources that adequately buttresses the Uribe administration's efforts to achieve peace and prosperity , and for strengthening the State, as articulated in the Cartagena Declaration. Together we must help Colombia prevail.

We all have an obligation and a responsibility to help President Uribe and the Colombian people. The United States government is providing--and has plans to continue providing--assistance to all six thematic areas identified by the Colombian government to focus and improve the overall impact of future international donor assistance. Substantial United States Government support to alternative development has contributed to a considerable expansion of opportunities for social, economic and democratic progress by peasants caught up in illicit drug cultivation, the internally displaced, those at risk of human rights abuses, traditionally

underserved populations such as the Afro-Colombians and indigenous populations, and other vulnerable Colombians. We are also working with the trade ministry and other important public and private sector institutions to help maximize the impact that the upcoming Andean free trade agreement will have on employment and income generation. This will benefit the economy in ways which will create increased opportunities for people to enter the licit market.

We stand firm in our commitment to President Uribe and the Colombian people and share their vision and quest for peaceful coexistence. We also recognize the importance of intensified coordination and collaboration with the entire international donor community. In this spirit, we endorse the Declaration of Cartagena and will redouble our efforts to help ensure that projects and activities--undertaken as part of our assistance program--support and compliment the programs of the Government of Colombia outlined in the six thematic blocks. We will also ensure the tightest possible coordination with the EU, other donors and--critically--the private sector. We look forward to working closely and collaboratively with the Colombian government, the international donor community, civil society and the private sector in the months and years ahead to broaden and deepen, the impressive results achieved over the past several years.